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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the development of a character education program that is based on the concept of a "whole village partnership." The partnership was formed by a retiring chief executive officer (CEO) of a major corporation, who sought ways to help his community rededicate itself to the "core" values of democracy. The project is supported by a coalition of private business, philanthropic foundations, public broadcasting, and regional educators. Data were obtained from document analysis; group interviews with project committees; individual interviews with project administrators, staff, and teachers; and observations. Most persons and groups involved in the partnership cited the founding CEO as their motivation for joining the project. Although no empirical data exist, a pre- and post-test of 845 students in one participating district indicates that students know more about drugs and social-refusal skills, but have not improved their images about themselves or their schools. They also remain vulnerable to environmental stresses. However, the partnership is judged to be successful because its effective slogan system has provided leaders with a formal language structure and validated the beliefs of school practitioners. Its hierarchical organization has effectively transmitted the project's purpose from the primary partners to the principals and teachers. Superintendents, principals, and teachers said they liked the program because of its effect on students. The overall impact of this program is still open to debate. One figure and two tables are included. (LMI)

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The Ceremonial Use of Slogans in the Implementation and Initiation of an Educational Partnership

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Southwest Regional Laboratory

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Introduction

It takes the whole village to raise a child

The image of the whole village has been adopted by business leaders and school officials in a midwestern urban area to portray the spirit behind their alliance. The overarching goal of this partnership is to create a learning community that fosters the development of responsible citizens: "when we teach all children in our village to be responsible, they become better citizens in and out of school, and they work harder and more effectively to achieve world class standards, further learning and become productively employed".

The partnership offers members assistance in restoring character education to the public schools. It is *alluring* because it touches the nostalgic memories of individuals who believe that the difficulties facing society could be reduced if the transformation of village schools to urban systems could be reversed (Tyack, 1974). It has built a wide support base because it is *vague* enough to appeal to a diverse group of patrons. At the same time it is *specific* enough to direct classroom practitioners. It conveys its message through a formal language structure that can be evaluated along these three dimensions of a slogan system: its attractiveness or allure, its vagueness and its specificity (Apple, 1992).

This description of the partnership is based on information that was drawn from project-generated documents; group interviews with project committees; individual interviews with project administrators; staff and teachers; and, from observations of school and classroom activities. As data were compiled and the various perspectives were synthesized, patterns began to emerge that suggested that a conceptual framework based on the hierarchical structure of a village and the attributes of a slogans system would be useful in assessing the initiation and implementation of the partnership.

Pre-Partnership Context

To educate a person in mind and not in morals is to educate a menace to society.

—Theodore Roosevelt

This partnership was formed six years ago when the retiring chief executive officer of a major corporation, who will be called Robert, ardently looked for ways to help his community rededicate itself to the "core" values of a democracy. His dedication was influenced by his years of public service and his sense that society is in a deep moral decline.

The factors that have contributed to the moral decline, that Robert summarized for us, echo the problems that have been identified by leaders of a growing national effort to restore character

education to the public schools. Thomas Likona (1993), a spokesman for the movement, looks back to the days when McGuffey Readers taught children about "honesty, love of neighbor, kindness to animals, hard work, thriftiness, patriotism, and courage"; and, reminds us that: "The public schools were established to not only teach people how to be smart, but also how to be good". As he surveys the history of education in the twentieth century, he chronicles the events that have pushed character education out of the classroom. His list includes: the influence of Darwinism (evolution has led people to see all things, including morality, in flux); the philosophy of logical positivism in American universities (values are mere expressions of feeling and are not objective truths); the deligitimization of moral authority in the 1960s; the intensification of plurality in American society; the secularization of public institutions; the predominance of values clarification approaches and Kohlberg's stages of moral dilemma in the 1970s; the dissolution of the family; and the increase in youth violence.

Three years prior to the formation of the partnership, Robert's conviction that the public would be receptive to moral guidance was heightened when he successfully implemented an ethical code in his own corporation. His years of service as a Boy Scout leader had convinced him that the essential virtues of a moral life were those embodied in the scout's oath and laws. He gave a copy of the oath and laws to a special task force, and told them that although he did not expect his corporate code to duplicate the scout's, he did want it to reflect its positive spirit. He wanted a proactive document that emphasized a sequence of "Thou shalts", rather than "Thou shalt nots". He expressed to us how surprised he was when his committee presented him with a code that was almost identical to the scout's, except that the "God part" had been left out. By the time Robert retired, over 100,000 employees had received a training course in ethical conduct.

After Robert retired he focused his attention on the community. He felt that the school system was the surest avenue for initiating the changes he was interested in because of his belief that schooling is essential to a person's success; and, because it was assessable through his influence with local school leaders. Both of these factors have been identified as primary motivations for our culture's persistent use of the school system as a vehicle for societal reform (Cuban, 1989).

Character Education Curriculum

Only virtuous people are capable of freedom. Nothing is more important for the public weal than to form and train up youth in wisdom and virtue.

—Benjamin Franklin

Robert had heard about a character education program that is being piloted in various parts of the country. The program features instructional elements that have been identified as essential to the success of this type of curriculum (Brooks and Kann, 1993). It uses teacher-centered, direct instructional methods that highlight a new value every month. Throughout its month, the featured value is infused into the curriculum and is continually placed in front of students. During "Be Polite" month, for example:

- All school staff, including the custodians and lunch room workers remind students to be polite.
- Teachers read allegories to students that portray the importance and benefits of being polite.
- Classroom bulletin boards display student generated projects.
- Students earn extra points for being polite.
- Banners and posters featuring the "Be Polite" theme are hung throughout the school.
- Student work and behavior is publicly recognized during daily school announcements and awarded during monthly assemblies.

The curriculum emphasizes positive language. Teachers are asked to use positive requests, such as "Be on time" and "Be prepared" rather than negative demands such as "Don't be late" or "Don't forget your pencil". It is also intended to be easy to implement. It provides teachers a set of materials that are simple and straightforward; and, that do not require any special training or lengthy preparation. The philosophy behind the use of "teacher friendly" materials is to avoid teachers viewing the curriculum as another "add-on" rather than as an integral component of their teaching.

Initiation

Responsibility is the price of freedom.

In the spring of 1987, Robert arranged to have one of the originators of the character education movement speak to a group of community leaders from private business, philanthropic foundations and public broadcasting. Following this address, Robert passed the hat and asked each of the represented institutions to donate $200,000 to sponsor a program locally. By 1992, over 30 corporations, 5 non-profit foundations and one television station had donated money to implement character education in the public schools.

Next, Robert invited the superintendents and key personnel from seven of the area's school districts to a meeting with the community donors, and in what has been described as a "quiet but powerful speech" he reminded his listeners that:

> Our desirable, but fragile, form of government, a free republic, depends upon a virtuous populace, for only a virtuous people are capable of freedom. . . Today throughout America, far too many homes and schools are no longer fulfilling their traditional roles as protectors and promoters of ethical values. . . far too many young people are growing up with almost no exposure to the values that once united Americans of all backgrounds. And with a few exceptions, we in business and government have done virtually nothing to under gird and reinforce the ethical values that our young people at one time brought to the adult world.
>
> Now, I want to propose that we become partners in addressing the need for character education . . .

All seven of the superintendents agreed to become partners and to implement character education programs in their own districts.

The Whole Village Partnership

What good will it do if we graduate people who are brilliant but dishonest, who have great intellectual knowledge but don't care about others, or who are great thinkers but are unethical?

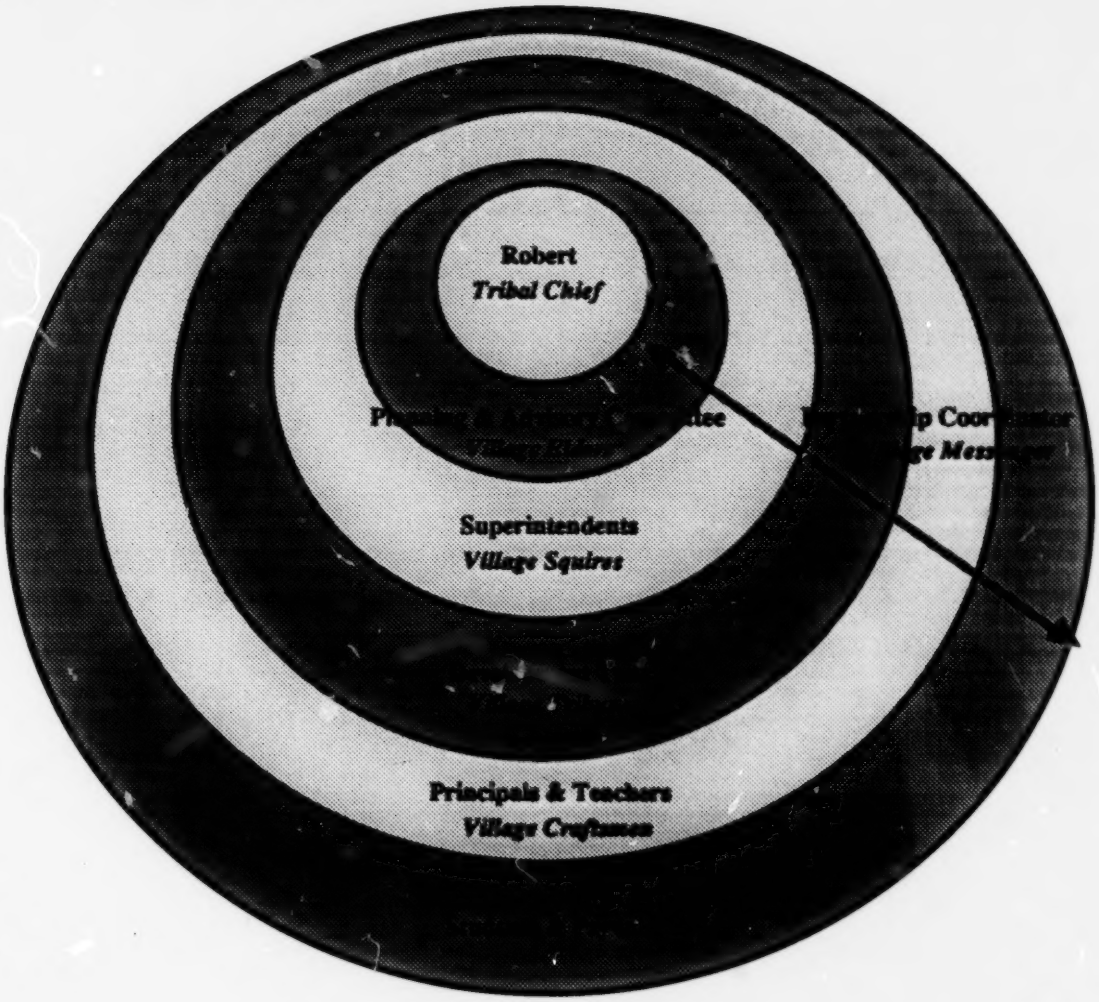
The image of a tribal village, with a benevolent chief directing its activities and ceremonies aptly conveys the organizational structure of this partnership. It can be viewed as a series of embedded circles (Figure 1); where the members of the most inner circles have the greatest authority.

Almost unanimously, the people we interviewed during our week-long visit, identified Robert as the visionary leader of the partnership. One of the program's district coordinators thought of Robert as a "tribal chief". Others identified him as a "village elder", as the partnership's primary benefactor and spokesperson, and as a very influential man in the community and the state.

Within the next level of the circle are the "village elders" that comprise the governing body of the partnership. This group, the Planning and Advisory Committee, is chaired by Robert and is made up of representatives from the funding corporations, community agencies, the original seven founding superintendents and the media. The committee meets quarterly to determine the guidelines that each member district should follow, review the progress of implemented programs, and raise money. This committee also serves as the point of contact for other communities interested in implementing character education programs.

The superintendents of the participating districts comprise the next level of the organization. Very early in the partnership's inception, Robert recognized that: "Educators don't like to be told what to teach". So, after a superintendent has committed to the program, he (we observed no women superintendents) is given responsible for obtaining community consensus for the values to be included, determining the form that the instruction will take, and allocating funds to match the amount he receives from the partnership. As a group, the participating superintendents can be thought of as "village squires" who meet quarterly to review district progress and to provide guidance on the development of shared programs and models of community support.

Figure 1: The Whole Village Partnership



The Development Team forms the next circle in the partnership structure, and can be viewed as the "village tribunal". This committee listens to each district's project proposals and decides whether or not they merit funding. Members of the development team reported to us that all of the programs that have been "responsive to the spirit of the partnership" have been funded. An example of a program that has been turned down is one based on sex respect. The partnership has been careful to steer itself away from touchy issues, because in Robert's words, they "could shoot us down in flames before we got off the ground".

The next circle in the partnership are the "village craftsmen"—the principals and teachers in the participating schools who are responsible for implementing the programs that their districts design. Outside the circle of teachers and principals, furthest from the center, are the students who

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are targeted to receive the curriculum and their parents who are asked to support the character development of their children at home.

One last member of the village who needs to be identified is the village messenger. This role is filled by the partnership coordinator who is responsible for carrying the vision of character education from the center of the organization outward to the principals and teachers in the schools. This position, which is filled by a woman, is also responsible for assisting the superintendents to design and implement their programs. She chairs the Development Team and reports to the Planning and Advisory committee and the superintendents. She is credited for her role in actualizing the implementation of the curriculum in the schools, and is described as a person who "beats the bushes and makes things happen".

Implementation

Character education is the glue that holds everything else together.

The partnership for character education comes close to being the kind of educational program that can be referred to as a slogan system (Komisar & McClellan, 1961). Michael Apple (1992) has identified three attributes that a slogan system must have if it is to be effective. First, at its broadest level of operation, it must be vague enough so that individuals and groups representing differing points of view can fit together underneath its "umbrella". Second, it needs to be specific enough, at the level of the practitioner, so that it will be implemented in the manner intended by its creators. Finally, it needs to have the ability to "grab" its audience. It can accomplish this either by charming or by playing on the fears of its listeners—either way, it generates a call to action.

Attractiveness is probably the most essential attribute of a slogan system (Komisar and McClellan, 1961). Slogan systems die from lack of attention and interest. When the general slogans in a system fail to capture the imagination, they begin to lose their power. Eventually, even the most loyal disciples begin to lose interest, the system starts to fade and eventually dies.

As the creator of the partnership, and many of its slogans, Robert has the oratorical skills necessary to successfully mobilize the community and the school districts into action. There are no indications that interest in the partnership will begin to fade any time in the near future. We have referred earlier to his "quiet but powerful" speeches. He has inspirational words to offer any occasion. During our visit, for example, we observed him stand up and close a Project Advisory committee with the words of George Washington:

> To personally understand and maintain the American way of life, to honor it by his own exemplary conduct and to pass it intact to future generations is the responsibility of every true American.

Later, while he was sharing the history of the partnership, he reminded us that "unless we exercise our responsibility with our rights, our freedom, we're going to lose it".

Robert's message reaches deep inside his listeners and stirs their own beliefs and fears about the failing condition of society. It moves them into action. The project director, for example, was inspired to approach Robert after hearing him speak in her church and volunteer her services to the program. By joining the effort, the members of the partnership have willingly accepted Robert's authority and his assumptions concerning the importance of character education. In return, they have been accepted into an organization of persons who share their own beliefs. Table 1 summarizes the reasons that were given for the importance of character education. The items in italics are direct quotes that were taken from the interview transcripts.

The statements used to describe character education, indicated in Table 1, have the same quality and energy as Robert's more general slogans. They also are a subset of his reasons for supporting the re-establishment of character education. This underscores the pervasiveness of the slogan system and the ability it has to maintain its meaning as it moves from the center of the organization out towards its edges.

Most of the persons and groups that we interviewed cited Robert as a motivation for joining the partnership (Table 1). Several of our interviewees reported how important it was to them to have found an organization that supported their own beliefs. One woman had told Robert that she really appreciated the fact that "you in the corporate community are wanting us to get back to teaching a basic sense of values because we really felt it was needed, but we've had just the opposite feeling in recent years". For these members, the strength of the collaboration is the validity it gives to ideas they were already committed to, but felt they had no support for. The program focuses on their needs and unites them in a common effort. "Synergy" was used by several individuals to describe the sense of empowerment they had received from their group involvement.

Table 1. Importance of Character Education and Motivations for Joining the Partnership

Partner	Importance of Character Education	Motivations
Program Advisory Committee	• Improve quality of life • Society has abandoned values education • *Keep kids in school* • *Responsibility teaches youth they are not victims* • *If values are to be learned they must be learned in school*	• Robert • Membership in prestigious group • Production of an *honest* work force
Superintendents		• Robert • Matching grants • Interaction with high profile business leaders
Director of School Cooperative	• Will impact problems in urban education. • Values more important than reading and writing • *Its doing the right thing*	• Robert • Matching grants. • Interaction with high profile business leaders
PACE Coordinator	• *Just what kids need*	• Heard Robert speak in church • *She just gives & gives & gets great satisfaction from it personally*
Development Team	• Development of *whole child*	• Robert • Strength of collaboration legitimizes own effort • Synergy—United effort towards common goal
District Coordinator	• *A thing who's time has come* • *Professional authority & moral authority. . . it takes the two to really make things happen*	• Robert • Asked by superintendent.
Principal & District Coordinator		• Robert • Superintendent appointed her • Idea sharing with other districts
District Coordinator	• Deterioration of families • At-risk students *should not be left by wayside* • Worsening behavior of adolescents	• Robert • Superintendent • Idea sharing among schools
Principal	• *We have character traits we know and we understand are important for children to have* • *We have children who have* not been taught these things • Children cannot grow up in vacuums	• *Robert is like a tribal chief... he has given program credence, dignity, importance* • Common, shared language
Teachers	• *Responsibility is so important*	• Principal: *she is just gung ho, other principals not as involved* • Pride in school.

Vagueness at a certain level of operation is desirable for a slogan system because it allows the greatest number of dissimilar and competing interests to co-exist within its domain. Over-interpretation of a system at this level reduces its attractiveness and weakens its support. The slogans used at the highest level of the character education partnership are moving, but they are also vague. They are aimed at the corporate leaders and the superintendents and are intended to increase program support and expand the partnership's sphere of influence. These slogans have also been successful in attracting supporters who might not otherwise agree with the approach. For example, Robert has been able to use the vagueness of the system to quiet the objections of the Eagle Forum, which did not feel that the character education programs being implemented were explicit enough.

An act of delimitation must occur, however, before the program elements are brought into the classroom. Just as Robert had the Boy Scout oath and laws in mind when he asked for a corporate code of ethics, he also had the elements of a specific character education program in mind when he instigated the partnership. By presenting these elements to the superintendents he was providing them with a model of what their programs should look like. And, even though he emphasized the autonomy of the individual districts to develop their own programs, he was once again "pleasantly surprised" when most of the programs developed were very similar to the model he provided.

The perceptions of the general features of character education at each of the organizational levels are summarized in the first column of Table 2. At every organizational level, the democratic identification of values, district autonomy, and the intent that character education is not an add-on program, were identified as being important. However, the programs that we observed during our visit all had features similar to the nationally recognized character education model. These features are listed in the "Implementation" column in Table 2. All programs we observed highlighted a different value each month and displayed the featured values in as many ways as possible throughout the school. The virtue of the month was embedded into every activity that was taking place in the school and students were being rewarded for exemplary behavior.

When the teachers were asked whether they believed that character education was a burden to their already demanding schedules, they told us that it was not. Many expressed that the program legitimized what they had instinctively been doing all along. Most agreed that although it required some initial effort to look for ways to incorporate the values in the beginning, it became second-nature to them as they went along. "You hit it first thing in the morning. . .then it's just brought up all day long". All teachers felt that the program had made a positive impact on their students, and some expressed that it was an effective disciplinary tool.

During our school visits, we observed that the positive, proactive language was being transformed back into negative demands. The requests to "Be Polite" and "Be Responsible" had become "Don't be rude", or "Don't be disrespectful". This aspect of the program was particularly disturbing because it appeared as though the values were being used by the principles and teachers to maintain order. "Show respect" was being used to remind students to be polite to adults; however, we did not hear anyone tell us about how the adults were using the program to remind themselves to show respect to the students.

Table 2. Character Education Features as Perceived and Implemented

Partner	Perceptions	Implementation
Program Advisory Committee	• Direct method of instruction • Not an *add-on* curriculum • Democratic identification of values	
Superintendents	• Focuses on school needs • *Not a cookie cutter approach* • Umbrella—*Common commitment for multiple needs*	
Director of School Cooperative	• *Teachers, kids and superintendents like it* • Not an add-on program • Little training required for teachers	
Development Team	• Focuses on a real need. • Interaction with other district representatives	
District Coordinator	• *Uplifting...a totally inspiring thing* • *Once teachers get the idea in their heads, it becomes part of their language* • *It is fun. . . people totally agree and like it*	• *Its a very broad range of implementation. . . this being the pinnacle of it* • *We have a lot of it in place, people are using the language*
Principal & District Coordinator	• Program infused, not an add-on • Positive, proactive way to handle students • Umbrella includes parents & teachers	• Banners in hallways • New word/theme each month • P.A. announcements. • Resource packets for teachers.
District Coordinator	• Latitude given for district implementation. • Infused curriculum allows teachers to *Seize the moment* • Program has a broad base, *a large umbrella*	• 15 values in district • Banners, *Were you nice to your neighbor* • All school staff involved • Daily quotations read over intercom • *Seasonally appropriate* tasks (Christmas—homeless)
Principal	• Not an add-on, *something we do all the time...capitalize on the moment*	• Monthly fliers to parents • Student awards. • Bulletin board in every classroom • Moving speakers—firefighter who pulled naked child from burning building • *Don't be disrespectful, don't talk back, we don't do that here...*

Table 2. Character Education Features as Perceived and Implemented (Cont'd)

Partner	Perceptions	Implementation
Teachers	• Disciplinary Tool • *Not an add-on, you hit it first thing in the morning... then its just brought up all day long* • *Umbrella* program	• *We tell students we don't allow them to do that...to treat each other with respect* • *We stress saying positive things about other people* • In-class writing on monthly words • Imbedded stories in curriculum • Citizenship Honor Roll • Monthly student awards • Monthly letters home to parents • All of the words emphasized all of the time • *First class I had a lot of discipline problems... now, everyone knows what to expect* • *It's my behavior management program*

Research Considerations

Codes, pledges, teacher exhortations, and the like—are unlikely to have any significant or lasting effect on character.

—James Leming

Research on the effectiveness of character education programs, conducted in the 1920s, cast doubt on their effectiveness (Leming, 1993). In the first three decades of this century, character education was a major preoccupation. Industrialization, urbanization, immigration, World War I, the Bolshevik Revolution and the Roaring 20s, contributed to a mood in the country that social stability was being threatened and that moral standards needed strengthening. Education programs were implemented that utilized elaborate codes of conduct as a primary means to teach character. A widely used code emphasized the "ten laws of right living": self-control, good health, kindness, sportsmanship, self-reliance, duty, reliability, truth, good workmanship, and teamwork. Schools attempted to integrate these codes into all aspects of school life.

Between 1924 and 1929, the Institute of Social and Religious Research, funded by John D. Rockefeller, undertook the Character Education Inquiry, the most detailed and comprehensive inquiry to date into the nature of character and the school's role in its development. The study assessed the behavior of more than 10,000 students in grades 5 through 8 across the United States. Researchers created classroom situations that provided students with opportunities to cheat and found that the inclination to deceive varied widely across classrooms, schools and situational settings. Honesty in one situation did not predict that it would occur in another. Among the many disturbing conclusions presented in the final report is the following:

> The mere urging of honest behavior by teachers or the discussion of standards and ideals of honesty, no matter how much such general ideals may be "emotionalized," has no necessary relation to conduct... there seems to be evidence that such effects as may result are not generally good and are sometimes unwholesome... the prevailing ways of inculcating ideals probably do little good and do some harm. (Hartshorne and May 1928-1930).

Didactic methods alone—codes, pledges, teacher exhortations, and the like—are unlikely to have any significant or lasting effect on character (Leming, 1993). Character develops within a social web or environment, and educators should not expect that changes can be made easily. Also, as Williams (1993) points out, according to students, "teachers have to follow the values themselves", they have to be "fair" and "real"—not "phony". Teaching moral values doesn't work if teachers try to make a "big deal" out of it, or "have a separate class about it". Williams own research shows that formal lessons do not produce the best results. But rather, respect is best taught through modeling and quality teaching that creates a positive and safe moral climate.

To date, this partnership does not have concrete data indicating a positive effect on students. Everyone we interviewed believes that character education is improving their schools. However, a careful inspection of the results of an attitude survey administrated by one school district poses questions about the overall impact of the program. The 845 students who were pre- and post-tested during the school year increased significantly on their knowledge about the harmful aspects of drug use and their awareness of personal refusal skills. The items on which the students responses declined dealt with how students felt towards themselves, and whether or not they felt that they were "cared about" in the school environment.

These results are similar to those of the DARE program in San Diego. As reported in a San Diego Tribune editorial, the DARE program gets an 'F' because "kids come out of DARE with lots of knowledge about drugs, some improvement in their social skills and a more positive attitude toward police. But those who go through DARE are just as likely to get involved with alcohol and drugs as kids who don't." A similar situation seems to be taking place here, kids know more about drugs and a few personal and social refusal skills, but they do not have an improved image about themselves or school, and their vulnerability to environmental stresses remain unchanged.

Conclusion

This partnership is successful on the basis of its merits as a slogan system (Orlosky & Smith, 1972). It has provided business leaders and superintendents with a formal language structure that shows how responsive their organizations are to the concerns and fears of the general public (Meyer, 1977). It validates the beliefs of school practitioners and provides them with support for what they feel is important in the context of the classroom. Its hierarchical organization has effectively transmitted the intent of character education from the primary partner to the principals and teachers who are responsible for teaching it. The slogans used by the national and local leaders have permeated the entire educational system. Everyone we interviewed was excited about the program, and was eager to support it. Superintendents, principles and teachers expressed how much they liked the program because of the effect it was having on students. The strength of this effect cannot be assessed at this time; and research suggests that the overall impact of this type of program is still open for debate.

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